

# Getting and Keeping the Teachers We Need: *The Role of Alternative Routes*



Washington is experiencing teacher shortages in specific teaching areas, such as special education, math, and science, and in specific geographic regions. The nature of Washington's teacher shortage requires a strategic approach that includes both recruitment and retention strategies; and expanding Washington's new alternative route programs is a key part of this strategy. The six current alternative route partnership grant programs are operating school-based mentored internships for 150 interns — 63 supported by state funds, 87 with federal funds — who will become fully-certified teachers in shortage areas by the end of the 2002–03 school year.

"This fits my style. It is a real opportunity to be able to spend the whole year in the classroom."

■ Math and physics intern teacher **Grant Bowers**, *former Hewlett Packard engineer and owner, Advanced Transportation Projects*

The Alternative Routes Partnership Grant Program, provides support for the formation of partnerships between school districts and higher education teacher preparation programs to offer one or more of three school-based alternative routes to teacher certification. The programs are

aimed at experienced paraeducators and mid-career professionals with expertise in subject areas in which Washington has shortages, such as math, science, and special education. Characteristics of Washington's alternative route programs include:

- **Field-based partnerships** between districts and higher education preparation programs. The core of activities is the school and district in which the intern is placed;
- **Performance-based mentored internships** of one year or less complemented by classroom-based training and other formal learning opportunities offered on or near districts, online, or via the K–20 telecommunications network. Length of program is determined by the time required for candidates to demonstrate competency related to residency certificate standards. Thus programs are "open exit" rather than a set period of time for all;
- **Teacher Development Plan** that identifies the alternative route requirements for each candidate, crediting prior experience and education; and
- **High quality and quantity mentoring**, including completion of mentor training specifically designed for pre-service and beginning teacher.

In contrast to programs that require a specific number of courses and hours spent in a college classroom, these new partnerships are creating programs that are truly performance-based. They utilize a variety of instructional formats that capitalize on the opportunity for the immediate application of knowledge and skills in a K–12 classroom setting with students.

The mentored internship is intended to blend classroom teaching experience, under the supervision of a trained mentor teacher, with formalized learning opportunities provided by the higher education partner at or near the school site, leading to interns acquiring the competencies to become certified.

The three types of alternative route programs include:

**Route 1:** for classified instructional staff with transferable associate degrees, currently employed in a district and

seeking residency teacher certification with primary endorsements in special education or English as a second language.

**Route 2:** for classified staff with baccalaureate degrees or higher, currently employed in a district and seeking residency certification in subject matter shortage areas or areas with shortages due to geographic location.

**Route 3:** for individuals who are not currently employed in the district, or who hold emergency substitute certificates, and hold a baccalaureate degree or higher. Priority is given to individuals seeking residency certification in subject matter shortage areas or areas with shortages due to geographic location.

Washington's alternative route programs help Washington meet the goals and requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the reauthorization

*"We wanted to model our program as an apprenticeship, rather than a traditional teacher education experience, so that a lot of the learning takes place from the trained mentor teacher and not as much from the higher education classroom experience. So we paid careful attention to the selection and training of those mentors."*

■ **Michele LaRocque,**  
*Seattle Pacific University*

of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. As a mentored internship model, Washington's alternative routes do not place uncertified interns as classroom teachers-of-record, thus supporting the goal of ensuring that every child has a highly-qualified teacher.

## What we're learning

As the first cohort of alternative route interns enter Washington classrooms, we have already learned a great deal about

the strengths of this program, what needs greater focus and attention, and what our next steps need to be.

*"I am very interested in your program. While earning a Master's Degree in Instructional Technology, I piloted an interactive learning system for a school district. This required me to manage 30 classes of K–2 students per week in a computer lab and conduct staff development training at the same time. For the preceding two years I worked as an elementary school paraeducator. My passions are for children, technology, and teaching. All I need now is a certificate."*

■ *[e-mail received by PESB]*

■ **Demand far exceeds opportunities and funding support.** 586 qualified applicants for 150 intern positions.

With word of the programs continuing to spread, the PESB continues to receive a steady volume of inquiries.

■ **High caliber interns.** Programs report that interns in the alternative routes program are highly qualified and possessing a maturity that comes with the programs' required work experience. According to the

Washington State Institute for Public Policy's December 2002 report<sup>1</sup>:

- ◆ One-third of route 2 and 3 interns have advanced degrees, 46% of which are in science and engineering;
- ◆ 47% intended to teach middle school;
- ◆ Median age of interns is 41;
- ◆ 31% of interns are male, with 40% of the route 3 interns male, compared to 29% of employed teachers in 2002–03; and
- ◆ Interns are slightly more diverse than our practicing teachers — 13% ethnicity other than Caucasian, compared to 11%.

■ **Alternative route programs tend to be more performance-based.** The Washington State Institute for Public Policy's report also states that alternate routes programs tend to be more performance-based.

■ **Greater geographic reach needed.** Current programs all serve Western WA. Higher education institutions need incentives and assistance in making greater use of online methods and Washington's K–20 telecommunications system, and for forging more creative partnerships across institutions in order to extend their reach.

■ **Some districts need greater assistance in providing components of alternative route programs.**

High-need and small districts in Washington with severe shortages do

not have the capacity to operate alternative route programs or even collaborate with other districts without regional assistance.

Washington's ESDs have proven an essential partner, working with multiple districts in their region to implement alternative route programs. Support for ESDs to continue to provide assistance will be key in reaching areas of the state not currently served.

■ **Some higher education programs need more guidance and exemplary models to help them design and implement competency-based models.** For some higher education institutions, the shift from course- and credit-driven programs to programs based on demonstrated competencies gained through a variety of formalized learning opportunities is a difficult one both in terms of institutional obstacles and change in mindset and practice. Others have more readily embraced this new model and are emerging as exemplars. Without exemplary models and assistance, the tendency is to simply retrofit existing programs. In expanding existing or creating new alternative route programs, technical assistance is needed with program design and delivery to ensure they are truly performance-based.

■ **Alternative route programs are cost-effective.** The four private higher education institutions all charge less for their alternative route program than for their regular teacher preparation program. Programs are also reporting that as they progress beyond the initial piloting stage, they will have a better sense of true cost and be better positioned to examine additional potential savings. Several programs are considering implementing “package pricing” through which interns would pay a flat fee for the program, regardless of the length of time it takes to complete. This helps institutions cover their real cost, while removing the current financial disincentive related to candidates completing programs early.

“One of the real testimonies to the energy this has created has been that faculty are ‘fighting’ for the opportunity to teach in the alternative routes program. We are designing our traditional program to look more and more like our alternative routes program. Our regular program is being very much transformed by this experience.”

■ **Lynn Beck, Dean**  
*Pacific Lutheran University*

<sup>1</sup> Matson, S. (2002). *Alternative Routes to Teacher Certification in Washington State*. Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

■ **Alternative route programs can become increasingly self-sustaining.**

While the design of the alternative route program itself is a strong recruitment mechanism, it has been the state and federal funding for intern and mentor stipends that have enabled

participation. Nevertheless, over time, as districts move past the initial stages of implementing alternative routes they can begin looking at future staffing plans and funding support in ways that will enable their alternative route programs to be more self-

sustaining. For example, districts can enable paraeducators to retain their current employment while participating in an alternative route program, or relationships with local businesses may yield financial support for mid-career professionals transitioning to teaching.

## Funding and support

With the preparation, placement, and first-year support committed to the 150 alternative route interns already selected, all state and federal funds to support alternative route interns are completely expended. While existing programs have

a desire to become increasingly self-sustaining, the financial need of many interns, particularly paraeducators, will remain. Additional programs are witnessing the merits in participation, thus funding support beyond this first year is

essential in continuing the current rate of change and building on initial success. In addition, continued support will be needed to expand our program reach to parts of the state currently not served.

## Next steps: Continue existing exemplary programs and expand to new regions of the state

The PESB is requesting carry-forward funds from the legislature to expand and strengthen existing exemplary alternative route partnerships. In addition to upholding the existing quality assurance components of the current alternative route programs, we will work with partnerships in this next round to:

- Continue existing, exemplary alternative route programs;
- Expand to current unserved regions of the state with severe teacher shortages;
- Increase number of interns at lower level of cost;
- Provide greater technical assistance and oversight to districts on program

design and implementation; particularly with regards to maintaining paraeducator employment and intern/mentor selection and placement;

- Support articulation agreements between community college and teacher preparation programs;
- Support competency-based higher education partnership programs that meet alternative route criteria;
- Increase use of online and K–20 network; and
- Establish 2-year employment commitment in public schools for all interns receiving stipends.

### 568 qualified applicants for 120 internships

#### PESB Website hits:

- 12,481 hits to "Do you qualify for alternative routes?"
- 5,352 indicated they are qualified for one of the three alternative routes

## Expanding teacher preparation when and where we need it

In order for alternative routes to truly make a difference in Washington, they need to exist statewide, particularly in those communities experiencing the most severe shortages. The first round of alternative route grants produced programs in Western Washington only. The PESB proposes the creation of new, alternative-route certification-only teacher preparation centers strategically located in regions not currently served and experiencing the most severe shortages, beginning with the ESD 105 and ESD 101 regions.

The notion of a regional teacher preparation center represents a significant shift in the development and implementation of alternative route programs. In the first round of alternative route programs, districts partnered with a single higher education teacher preparation program and determined location. This process resulted in limited geographic reach of alternative route programs. Some in the legislature and education community have questioned whether our existing 22 teacher preparation programs have the capacity and

reach, given current funding and staff, to serve state need, or whether alternative providers, such as online university programs or the ESDs themselves, could also provide preparation programs. By determining the location in advance based on district need and ESD commitment, we want to challenge and support higher education to extend their reach. This extension of reach may include coordinating a consortia of multiple institutions to offer alternative route preparation programs or greater use of online and K–20 network.

## Related issues and questions for policymakers to consider

Alternative Route Partnership Programs do not exist in a vacuum. To be successful, they need to be part of larger, systemic efforts to ensure an adequate supply of well-qualified teachers, continuously improve teacher preparation, and raise standards for teacher certification. Washington is implementing new performance-based standards for preparation and certification, and new alternative routes build upon this progress. But for these alternative route programs to be successful and for Washington to address its overall teacher quality needs, there are a number of other issues that must be addressed.

### Recruitment

Alternative routes are only one means for expanding the pool of candidates to the teaching profession. Greater support is needed for other successful recruitment programs to attract individuals to the teaching profession, like high school teaching academies that provide opportunities for high school juniors and seniors to explore teaching as a career.

Students take classes in teaching methods and a practicum in which they gain experience in teaching a class under the supervision of a mentor teacher. Stronger links could be created between these programs and running start programs in higher education so that coursework taken through the teaching academy could count toward a higher education teacher preparation program.

*“At a time when our applicant pool is shrinking, it’s so exciting to see such top-notch people — especially our math interns. I asked my intern in October, ‘Are you ready to take over the classroom?’ She said, ‘NO!’ They see the value in the mentored internship and a program that they complete when they show they’re ready. When she gets certified, she’ll be ready and confident.”*

■ *Alternative Route Mentor Teacher*

### ***Retention***

The best of recruitment efforts will be of limited value if we cannot retain good teachers. Key to retention of new teachers is a supportive school environment. It makes little intuitive sense, yet is very common, that first-year teachers wind up with the least desirable assignments with the worst facilities and equipment. This often means they are assigned those students that are struggling most, and in greatest need of an experienced teacher. Newly-certified teachers need a reasonable teaching load, in an appropriate assignment, with the continued support of a mentor teacher to guide their continued professional growth. Opportunities for professional growth with related compensation is also related to recruitment and retention; especially for mid-career professionals considering the teaching profession. More opportunities for increased responsibilities within teaching, such as serving as a mentor, curriculum advisor, or school improvement consultant, are key to retaining great teachers that desire continued growth and development.

### ***Pay that recognizes past experience***

The PESB believes that the relevant past experience that alternative route candidates and mid-career professionals in other preparation programs bring to teaching should be recognized on the state's salary allocation schedule. However, we also recognize that this is a complex issue with equity concerns related to other certificated staff. For example, educational staff associates with very similar past experience (such as speech and language pathologists previously employed in hospitals), receive no recognition on the salary schedule for that experience. Plan 2 vocational education teachers, on the other hand, receive both credit toward certification and recognition on the salary schedule for their previous work experience. In addition, the salary allocation schedule sets a maximum level of experience beyond which teachers no longer receive additional compensation. Recognition of relevant experience on the salary allocation schedule must be equitable and available to all certified educators.

### ***Mentor Stipend versus Cooperating Teacher Stipend***

While the Board strongly believes that trained mentor teachers for alternative routes candidates should be compensated for their increased responsibilities and the training required, we recognize that there are other mentoring roles in which teachers are currently serving through which they receive little or no compensation. Cooperating teachers that supervise student teachers through higher education preparation programs receive as little as \$100 per semester. Consistency and equity in funding for the increased responsibility assumed by mentor teachers is important in ensuring that highly-qualified teachers pursue and serve in this crucial role.



## Additional resources

The PESB has assembled an extensive collection of research articles and information from other states and districts related to compensation reform and alternative compensation models. For more information, contact the PESB office.

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